

By Sidney Smith

The Vengeance of Henry Jarroman

Must the Woman Always Pay?

By ROY VICKERS

"BRING him to lunch," suggested Nadia, looking around her perfect room.

"Impossible!" he answered. "One has to be jolly careful not to run after a man like that."

From which emphatic statement Nadia was led to conclude that Carrondale had asked himself to lunch when he appeared with Wilfred on the following day.

Wilfred sent her no warning. But she knew the identity of her guest before his name was mentioned; not that he was the least like his published photographs. The quality of personal magnetism is as unmistakable as it is intangible.

She knew, too, the moment when her eyes met, just why he had come. Carrondale had seen what sort of a girl Henry Jarroman had. He paid the compliment to her intelligence of scarcely troubling to veil his purpose. She seemed unaware of his quick, unerring glance, but her whole wifehood was crying out with satisfaction in the knowledge that she was approved of as far as appearance, dress and deportment were concerned. She was thrilled by the novel sensation of being sought and estimated by a man who had not the smallest desire to make love to her, who was totally uninterested in her personality as such, being merely concerned to discover whether Carrondale could bring the added weight of a socially useful wife to the embryo party.

As the luncheon progressed, any nervousness she might have felt at the prospect of her meeting had completely disappeared. Her task was in itself a simple one. He was not looking for a brilliant woman who could turn next to the Prime Minister's latest suitor. The political woman, she knew, perished miserably in the eyes of a man looking for a balanced, gracious hostess, and it was not hard to give him what he required.

She was shrewd enough not to lead the conversation into channels designed to call attention to the merits of her husband. She knew a wife's best advantage is in the simple fact which takes his value for granted and assumes every one else does the same.

Before the meal was over Carrondale was telling her a foolish anecdote of his boyhood, laughing inordinately at an imperceptible point—and Nadia knew that she had succeeded. Before she withdrew to leave them to their coffee Carrondale referred to a deputation of foreign constructors who were coming to England to see him a month later. Nadia crouched for her opportunity and sprang in with the suggestion that the deputation should be accommodated at her house.

When she left them she could see that Carrondale would rather she had remained.

She went to a long glass in her drawing room and deliberately studied herself. She wore today a dark silk turban, well chosen, well served; the table appointments quiet but distinctive. Nadia looked round her drawing room. She loved the room—she had spent hours in planning it, in enhancing its delicate charm in terms of line and color and space.

Half an hour later Carrondale had taken a reluctant departure. Nadia, waiting for Wilfred to return to her, sat within her growing elation. The prospect she had made with herself of a swallowtail seemed practicable. He had resolved then, under the stars, to ask no line of the role that had thrust upon her; she had promised Carrondale to remain Henry Jarroman's daughter, until she could discuss with him the trick that fate had played them both, until she could exact from him a promise to take no vengeance for that theft of the Camilla fortune. It would add to the coming was so delayed; it brought forward complications, such as the nation, now in abeyance, of a country house. Well, if necessary, the house must be bought; it would add to the difficulties of restitution, but Mr. Jarroman could be made to understand that had been part of the role.

Wilful Sense of Honor

"I'm sorry I had to spring him on you," said Wilfred, entering quickly. "But he said he wanted to talk to me about the building stunt, so I rushed off here before he had time to change his mind. Jolly good thing I did, too! 'Are you going to talk with him, Wilfred?' he asked.

"I think so," he said, flushing with pleasure. "I think so. But it's too early to bet on it. After you left us began to talk really confidentially. The way, there's just one thing, old man, that's a bit of a blunder."

"What's that?"

"You want to use a bit of discrimination in talking to a chap like that, you know. You amused him all right, I'm not denying that. But—well, if you'd worked the conversation round to houses, for example, we might have got in one or two good points."

Nadia's heart sank. Tears of bitter disappointment welled as she realized the only intention she had made upon Wilfred by her careful work was that she had mildly hampered him. But that was not all. She had made a mistake. She had come instead laughing—the still, sallying laughter that ripples only in the places of the soul. In that moment was born to her the wife's sense of humor—the sense that teaches a woman to deny her own triumphs and laugh in the denial and be glad.

"I'm sorry, dear," she murmured. "I must be more careful next time. You must teach me to be really useful."

He caught her to him.

"Nadia, am I to speak like that? I don't forget for a moment all that you've done for me. I—I don't mean to lay down the law about things."

Now was the moment to kill the suspicion which, she knew, still tormented the deepest consciousness—that she regarded the use of her money for what were, primarily, his interests. She searched for words, but even while she searched she was sitting again with her old difficulties. The money was there, neither he nor she was free to do as they pleased. Even her deception of Wilfred in his embrace, and at once he knew it. They stood looking at each other, and each knew that the other suffered.

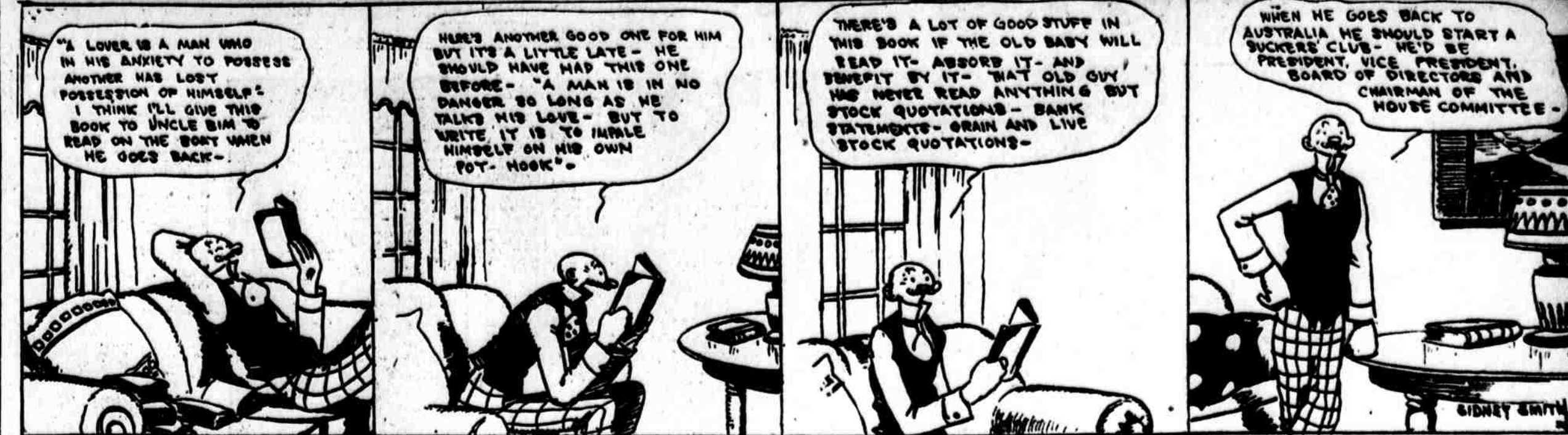
A sound at the door drove them far apart.

"Lady Doucester, madam."

Lady Doucester had not accepted Carrondale's invitation to dine with them, given her a few hours of their return to town. Her note had explained that her house was occupied by a guest, and had added that she would prefer to come informally as a friend, not as a mother-in-law.

There was certainly something very nice in friendship in the glance she gave Nadia as she greeted her now.

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